United Nations A/58/PV.82

General Assembly

Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

82nd plenary meeting
Wednesday, 7 April 2004, 10 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the President of the Security Council

The President: I should like to acknowledge with appreciation the fact that the President of the Security Council is participating with us today as we commemorate the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda.

Agenda item 39 (*continued*)

New Partnership for Africa's Development: progress in implementation and international support

(b) Causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa

Commemorative meeting to mark the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda

The President: Members will recall that the Assembly concluded its consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 39 at its 78th plenary meeting on 23 December 2003.

In order for the General Assembly to hold the commemorative meeting today, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of the sub-item.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 39?

It was so decided.

Statement by the President of the General Assembly

The President: If we could turn back the hands of time, we should surely go back to that fateful day and time in 1994 when ethnic and other differences erupted into tragedy, violence and genocide in Rwanda and shook the region and the world. Knowing what we now know, there would be no blurred lines or ambiguities to affect our understanding of the complexities that triggered the genocide. Importantly, we would be better prepared to take preventive and other action consistent with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

But while we may look backwards, we must move forward. The direction in which we go has been set out for us by the leaders of the countries of the continent of Africa most profoundly affected by the catastrophic events in Rwanda. The General Assembly has concurred with the Executive Council of the African Union in determining that, in commemoration of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, an International Day of Reflection and commitment to fighting against genocide throughout the world should be proclaimed. Today, 7 April 2004, we commemorate that International Day of Reflection on the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

04-30090 (E)

The charge to us on this International Day of Reflection is quite specific. It begins, as it ought to, with honouring the memory of the victims of the genocide in Rwanda. Those victims were the people of whom the United Nations Charter speaks and for whom the entitlements of human rights and fundamental freedoms of tolerance and social justice are recorded under the Charter. Yet no less than 800,000 of them, men, women and children, perished at the hands of those with whom they should have been engaged in nation-building.

What a pity it is that ethnicity did not yield to nationhood. What a pity it is that the deliberate killing of the President of Rwanda, together with the President of Burundi, did not cause a nation to mourn but instead resulted in 100 days of terror and violence in full view of the United Nations and the world. What a pity it is that people could be targeted for assassination, that complicity could be all around and that the media could help to fuel the conflict.

So, on this solemn occasion, we remember those who lost their lives. We express our sincere sympathy to their families and friends, and we share the hopes and aspirations of the Government and the people of Rwanda in seeking to heal and rebuild a nation that is democratic and which has as its overarching vision economic and social progress for all.

What happened in Rwanda is recognized by the international community as genocide within the scope of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. We are therefore reminded, on this International Day of Reflection, that we must act in accordance with the Convention in Rwanda and wherever genocide and other violent acts and atrocities are perpetrated.

Many of those who perpetrated violent acts in Rwanda — Government officials, the military and civilians — were not people in faceless crowds. They could be identified and could be brought to justice. They could be made to understand that it is not wise to seek to remake a diverse world such as ours in their own image, because seeking to do so could result in untold tragedy.

The early establishment by the Security Council of the Rwanda Tribunal in November 1994, with its seat in Arusha, in the United Republic of Tanzania, sent a clear message that genocide and other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in Rwanda, and even in neighbouring States, could not be perpetrated with impunity. The Tribunal's task is a prodigious one, but its accomplishments are critical to assuring survivors and the families of the victims of the genocide in Rwanda, and others throughout the world who would perpetrate similar acts, that justice can and will be done.

The United Nations, specifically the Security Council, has been given under the Charter the authority to maintain international peace and security. It is called upon to exercise that authority no matter how formidable the challenge. We can ill afford to be silent, selective or inconsistent in our responses when violence threatens to engulf a country or region.

The international community did not act in time to stop the violence in Rwanda. We know that horrific acts were taking place even as United Nations peacekeeping forces were on the ground and that some peacekeepers also lost their lives in the violence.

Having had a decade to reflect on what happened in Rwanda, we will, I know, agree that we should have acted differently. That underscores the challenge to all of us to seek to ensure that our commitment to multilateralism is given the standing to which we agreed in the Charter of the United Nations and in international law, no matter what the circumstances.

Nevertheless, I believe that the tragedy in Rwanda has swung open the door of opportunity for Rwanda, the United Nations and the international community. I believe it has underscored for the Government and the people of Rwanda the value of finding alternatives to armed conflict and violence and the importance of according a central place to dialogue, human rights, human dignity and national unity in the affairs of their country. For the United Nations, it has stimulated discussions and debate over the broad spectrum of issues concerning the Organization's role in crisis and conflict within Member States. Importantly, it has afforded the Organization the opportunity to confront head on the issues that could lead to other tragedies such as that which occurred in Rwanda.

Today, we are called upon to consider implementing the recommendations of the Carlson report as part of our reflection on the matter of genocide. We must be progressive, I believe, in determining our shortcomings in Rwanda and considering what we have done since then and what

remains to be done to prevent genocide in the years ahead. Those passionate voices that call in distress to our United Nations in the midst of tragedy must be assured that the United Nations will stand for human rights, for freedom and justice and for peace and security and that an appropriate response will be forthcoming.

I extend my sincere best wishes to the Government and the people of Rwanda on their road to permanent and lasting peace.

Statement by the President of the Security Council

The President: I now give the floor to the President of the Security Council, Mr. Gunter Pleuger.

Mr. Pleuger (President of the Security Council): Ten years after the genocide in Rwanda, we have gathered to reflect on the unbelievable suffering that struck its people and on our collective duty to avoid the recurrence of such atrocities.

As we look back at what happened, and ahead to the prospect of a brighter future, we must first look at ourselves — because it is in us that the peoples of the world have placed their hope that the dignity and worth of the human person will be preserved, and that social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom will be promoted.

Two weeks ago, Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated, with a sense of bitter regret, that the genocide in Rwanda should never have happened and that the international community failed Rwanda. This is a painful yet honest acknowledgement to which the Security Council has nothing to add or to subtract.

The genocide in Rwanda was a shock that moved the whole Organization; it triggered some important innovations in peacekeeping, it defined the mandate of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and it had a considerable impact on the work of the Security Council.

Since 1994, the Council has responded in various ways. Let me highlight four areas.

First, the Council has given increased attention to the prevention of conflict. In its resolution 1366 (2001) of 30 August 2001, the Council — acknowledging the lessons to be learned from the failure of preventive efforts that preceded the genocide in Rwanda — expressed its willingness to give prompt consideration to early-warning or prevention cases and invited the Secretary-General to refer to the Council such information and analyses.

Secondly, the Council has moved to address the root causes of conflict and to understand post-conflict peace-building as an effort aimed at creating a politically, socially and economically sustainable framework for a better, more prosperous future. With that in mind, the Council proceeded to promote, in post-conflict situations, security, justice and the rule of law; demobilization, disarmament and reintegration; and the initiation of international assistance, leading to the reconstruction and development of war-torn countries.

Thirdly, the Council has increasingly recognized the threats to international peace and security posed by massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, resulting in large-scale atrocities and genocide. In particular, the Council has acknowledged that combating impunity for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide is an essential tool for deterring the future commission of such crimes and for restoring the shattered faith of the victims. In reaction to the Rwanda genocide, the Council created the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

Fourthly, today we are witnessing a revival of United Nations peacekeeping missions in many parts of the world. Inspired by the Brahimi report and the lessons it drew from failures in Rwanda, the Council has established a number of multifunctional peacekeeping missions that are better prepared and, when necessary, more robust. The Council also found ways to respond swiftly and more effectively and to establish a more flexible cooperation with regional peacekeeping arrangements in cases of urgency. Recently, the situations in Haiti, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, as well as in Ituri, have benefited from that approach.

Yet, as much as the Council has progressed, it must not stop here. Knowledge, understanding and political will are commodities in constant need of reinvention and reaffirmation. This is particularly relevant for the preventive use of coercive measures authorized by the Security Council according to its competences under the United Nations Charter. Such measures may be necessary when other ways and means have proved insufficient and the Council needs to live up to its responsibilities in that regard.

The Council therefore welcomes wholeheartedly the fact that the Secretary-General has decided to

appoint a Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. The Council is confident that the Special Adviser can make an important contribution to the work of the Security Council. Therefore, it is my honour, on behalf of the Council as a whole, to express our determination and readiness to work, in accordance with the Charter, with the Special Adviser so as to address any situation that, if not prevented or halted, has the potential to lead to genocide.

As we look back at what happened in Rwanda 10 years ago, we also look forward. Indeed, the United Nations stands at a crucial juncture in its history. While learning lessons from the past, it is also readying itself to meet the challenges of tomorrow. The genocide in Rwanda has raised questions that affect all humankind — fundamental questions about the authority and responsibility of the Council, the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping, the reach of international justice, the roots of violence and the responsibility of the international community to protect people threatened by genocide and other grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

People watching us in Rwanda, and in any other place in the world, should understand that the United Nations is serious about mastering the challenge. Today, the Presidents of the General Assembly and of the Security Council, as well as high representatives of the Economic and Social Council, the United Nations Secretariat and the regional groups have come together to reaffirm their joint resolve. You should see this as a sign of hope. In return, we will understand that your hope places on us the obligation not to fail you again.

Message from the President of the Rwandese Republic

The President: Next on the programme for this meeting is a message, via video transmission, from His Excellency Mr. Paul Kagame, President of the Rwandese Republic.

President Kagame: On behalf of the people and the Government of Rwanda, I would like to extend our appreciation to the General Assembly for having adopted last December the resolution designating today, 7 April 2004, the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda.

We are grateful that today the General Assembly and people from different walks of life around the world are joining the people of Rwanda as we commemorate this most tragic and painful chapter in our nation's history.

Today, as we remember the over 1 million of our brothers and sisters who were killed in the genocide, we must ask ourselves whether appropriate measures are in place to ensure that genocide never happens again, anywhere in the world.

In Rwanda, we have adopted a two-pronged approach to banish the ideology of genocide.

One approach includes constitutional measures that prescribe punitive action against those who promote the harmful ideology of hate, intolerance and division within our communities.

The other approach includes implementing a proactive programme aimed at promoting national unity and reconciliation and encouraging open and frank discussions about the costly mistakes of the past so as to ensure that they are not repeated.

The international community for its part should ask whether an appropriate early-warning mechanism is in place to ensure that there is no repeat anywhere in the world of the events that occurred here in Rwanda in 1994. The response of the international community to a similar situation should not be allowed to be as inadequate as it was in Rwanda in 1994.

Over the past 10 years, Rwanda has made significant progress economically and politically. We held successful presidential and parliamentary elections in August and September last year. Local government has also been democratized and empowered through a process by which the central Government devolved power to the local authorities. We are promoting good and accountable governance, and have submitted ourselves for review under the Peer Review Mechanism of the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

Economically, we have begun the process of transforming our economy by encouraging innovation, competitiveness and improved Government performance. Our economy has been growing at a rate higher than 6 per cent per year, but we still face enormous problems in overcoming crippling poverty and underdevelopment.

We appeal to the international community to come to our assistance to support us as we rebuild our

country. We are determined to overcome the problems of the past, and we are confident that the foundation for a stable Rwanda has been established.

We are now moving forward, in the understanding that our ideals of socio-economic prosperity and human dignity for all Rwandans will prevail.

The President: I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General.

The Deputy Secretary-General: Ten years ago, the international community failed Rwanda. None of us — neither the Security Council, nor the United Nations Secretariat, nor Governments in general, nor the international media — paid enough attention to the gathering signs of disaster. And once the genocide was under way, none of us did enough to stop it, even when televised images of slaughter were visible all around the world.

Our sorrow is genuine and deep. But sorrow is of no use to the 800,000 people at least — men, women and children — who were left to suffer the most brutal of deaths. It will be of little meaning to future generations unless it is transformed into something more: real, concerted action, by the entire international community, to ensure that such a descent into horror is never again permitted.

The Secretary-General regrets that he is not with us today. But his choice of the Commission on Human Rights as the forum for his statement today seems to me highly appropriate. Genocide, after all, is the ultimate violation of human rights, and it usually comes as the climax of many lesser violations. Our human rights machinery therefore has a vital role to play in giving warning of its approach, and any action to prevent it must be grounded in a resolute effort to uphold universal human rights and human dignity.

In his statement, the Secretary-General announced an action plan which brings together a wide range of activities of the United Nations system under the rubric of preventing genocide. These activities include, first, preventing armed conflicts, and especially internal conflicts, which are never a sufficient explanation — let alone an excuse — for genocide, but which do seem to provide a necessary context and pretext for it. Preventing war is, indeed, the primary purpose of the United Nations and should be a conscious aim of our development work, as well as of our political and diplomatic activity.

Secondly, we must protect civilians, especially minorities, since they are genocide's most frequent targets. This is a task not only for our humanitarian and legal experts, but increasingly also for our peacekeepers — many of whom today are no longer restricted to using force only in self-defence, but often mandated also to protect local civilians who are threatened with imminent violence. They must be given the resources they need to fulfil those mandates.

Thirdly, we must work to end impunity by helping to build and maintain robust judicial systems, both national and international. The past 10 years have seen spectacular developments in international criminal law, with the ground-breaking verdicts of the two United Nations tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia and the creation of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, as well as the International Criminal Court. But the work done by our peacekeepers and development workers to help individual countries to strengthen their police and judicial institutions is no less important. All of these efforts need to be extended and stepped up.

Fourthly, we must monitor the warning signs that tell us when genocide or other comparable disasters are approaching. This is an area where the United Nations human rights system, as well as our humanitarian funds and programmes, are already heavily engaged, in partnership with civil society organizations. But there are still conspicuous gaps in our capacity to analyse and manage the information that the system gathers so that we can use it to understand complex situations and suggest appropriate action.

At least some of those gaps should be filled by the new post that the Secretary-General announced: that of Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. The Adviser's mandate will refer not only to genocide but also to mass murder and other large-scale human rights violations, such as ethnic cleansing. He or she will work closely with the High Commissioner for Human Rights to collect information on potential or existing situations or threats of genocide, and their links to international peace and security.

Unlike the special rapporteurs, with whom we are familiar, the Special Adviser will not only report to the Commission on Human Rights but will also act as an early-warning mechanism to the Security Council and

other parts of the system, including the General Assembly. He or she will report to those bodies through the Secretary-General and will make recommendations to the Security Council on actions to be taken to prevent genocide.

Indeed, I welcome the participation of the President of the Security Council in this meeting, since it is the action or inaction of the Council that will ultimately be decisive. No matter how good our early-warning systems may be, they will be of little use unless Member States can summon the political will to act when warning is received.

Right now, for example, we have abundant warning that something horrible is going on in the Greater Darfur region of the Sudan. As the Secretary-General said earlier today, it is vital that international humanitarian workers and human rights experts be given full access to the region and to the victims without further delay, and, he added, if that is denied, the international community must be prepared to take swift and appropriate action.

We cannot undo the past or reverse the crimes that were committed in Rwanda. We cannot repair the failure, but the world can be serious about preventing genocide. The Secretary-General said today that the legacy he would most wish to leave his successors is a United Nations better equipped to prevent genocide and able to act decisively when prevention fails. I believe we all have an obligation to help him achieve that, and I hope you will give him your support. That would be the best way to honour the victims who we remember today and to save those who might be victims tomorrow.

The President: Next we will hear the testimony of a Rwanda genocide survivor, Ms. Jacqueline Murekatete.

Ms. Murekatete: Good morning. Let me begin by saying what a privilege and honour it is for me to be here today.

When I woke up this morning, I could not help but think that if the decisions that were made back in 1994 had been different, if the warnings that were sent both before the genocide and during the genocide had been heeded and if actions had been taken to prevent what is now referred to as a preventable genocide, then more than one million men, women and children would be here today, among them my parents, my six siblings, my uncles, aunts, cousins and numerous other relatives. But as we know, that was not the case, and we are here today.

It was only 10 years ago today that my family and I listened to radio-sponsored announcements, as my family was being called cockroaches. The announcer said Tutsis were cockroaches, they were snakes. Tutsis were our misfortune, the announcer said, and the final solution at that time was to kill all Tutsis and anybody who sympathized with them. Before that day in April 1994, I had lived comfortably with my family. My parents were farmers, and I had four brothers and two sisters. We all had goals and dreams of growing up and going to college and becoming something. That, of course, all changed in April of 1994.

When the genocide reached my village, I was away in a different province, in my grandmother's village. When the Hutu neighbours in my grandmother's village started killing, I first ran away to the nearby county office, where we sought to be protected. But it was only a few days until our Hutu neighbours started coming there, and every night they came and killed women, men and children. My grandmother and I were fortunate in that we managed to escape in time, and I soon found myself hiding in the house of a Hutu man who had agreed to hide my grandmother and me. It was only a few days before the neighbours found out that he was hiding cockroaches, as Tutsis were referred to during the genocide.

I remember sitting one morning, trembling, as a group of men armed with bloody machetes and clubs stood in front of my grandmother and me, knowing that that could have been just it for me. But I did indeed escape, and later on my grandmother placed me in an orphanage where every day I had to watch as children came in bleeding from machete blows, as children came in whose arms and legs had been hacked off by machetes. Every night I listened as toddlers of two and three years cried, wondering where their parents had gone, asking "When is my mother, when is my father going to come back for me?", knowing very well that their parents had all been killed.

As the orphanage got overcrowded, diseases started spreading, and it became almost a weekly routine to bury children. Of course, on a daily basis we were exposed to scenes such as that of Tutsi men and women being grabbed as they tried to climb the fences of the orphanage, seeking refuge, and we watched as

armed Hutu men and boys grabbed them and took them to their death. Of course, every day we lived under constant fear, not knowing when we got up if we were going to live to see the next day. Indeed, many times men and boys armed with machetes and clubs came inside the orphanage and threatened the Italian priests, telling them they were going to kill every Tutsi child in the orphanage. Many times they packed us — one time in the cafeteria — and told us they were going to bomb the whole orphanage.

When the genocide ended, I was told by a surviving cousin that, one day during the genocide, my Hutu neighbours — yes, the same Hutu neighbours whose kids I had played and gone to school with, the same Hutu neighbours whose kids my mother had never hesitated to feed and give milk whenever they came by — these same neighbours had taken my parents, my four brothers and two sisters, my uncles, cousins, aunts and all the Tutsis in the village to the nearby river and had proceeded to butcher them with machetes, clubs and other similar instruments. Every day I was told of uncles who had been burned inside the house alive, of aunts who had been raped and mutilated before they were killed, of infants and toddlers who had been thrown alive into latrines and of massacres that had taken place in churches, as priests and nuns picked up machetes.

For a long time, it all did feel like it was a nightmare, a nightmare that I was going to wake up from and everything would be back to the way it was: I would have my parents, my brothers and my sisters and friends. But indeed I did wake up, and I realized that it was not a nightmare and that it had all occurred.

As we are gathered here today, I want us to remember all the innocent men, women and children who lost their lives in 1994 and the merciless and barbaric ways in which they died. But on this day I also want us to remember and keep in mind the suffering that is very prevalent in survivors today — survivors such as those women who are now dying of AIDS, having been raped during the genocide; survivors such as those orphans who now wander the streets having nobody to care for them; and survivors such as those women and widows who watched as their children were butchered right in front of their eyes and who, in some cases, had to watch as their infants were taken off their backs and butchered. I want us to keep all their suffering in mind and to try to help them whenever and however we can.

In conclusion, as we leave here today, I want us to once again remember the devastating fact that the men, women and children who lost their lives in 1994 would be here today if the international community had heeded the countless warnings that were sent both before and during the genocide and had acted in time to prevent their death.

As we are here today, I want each of us to resolve and to vow to do all we can to ensure that events such as those that occurred in Rwanda in 1994 will never again occur, whether in Rwanda or elsewhere in the world. I do not think that a world without genocide is something that we should only dream of. It is not an unattainable dream: it is a reality that can be brought about, provided, of course, that each of us is willing to work for it. It is a reality that each of us must be willing to work for, both for our own sake and for that of our children. I thank you very much for your undivided attention, and I want to let you know that your presence here today is very much appreciated by the Rwandans in Rwanda, by the Rwandans elsewhere in the world and, especially, by survivors like myself.

Rwanda remembrance songs

The President: Next on the programme for the commemoration is the performance by Ms. Cécile Kayirebwa of Rwandan remembrance songs.

Ms. Kayirebwa (*spoke in French*): The first of two songs I am about to sing concerns someone who is dying, who has seen others die and who thinks his time is about to come. The second song is a song of love for Rwanda.

Ms. Kayirebwa sang these songs for the General Assembly.

Ms. Kayirebwa (*spoke in French*): My third song tells of a child who awakens after losing consciousness. All around him, his father, his mother, his older sister and his younger brother are dead. There is no one left. He calls "Father! Mother!", but no one answers. At first, he cannot understand what has happened, but then he does. He understands. He says to himself: "I am all alone. The little one is all alone. Daddy and mommy are dead".

Ms. Kayirebwa sang for the General Assembly.

Boys Choir of Harlem

The President: Next is the performance by the Boys Choir of Harlem. I now invite them into the General Assembly Hall.

The Boys Choir of Harlem sang two songs for the General Assembly.

The President: Before giving the floor to the speakers on the programme, I have the pleasure of acknowledging the presence in our midst of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway.

Statement by the Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council

The President: I now give the floor to the Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council, Mr. Daw Penio.

Mr. Penjo (Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council): It is with honour and a deep sense of sadness that I take the floor, in my capacity as Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council, to commemorate with you the tenth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda. I also wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting and inviting us to join in the memory of the tragic events that took place and to reflect on what needs to be done to ensure that this never happens again.

The scale of the genocide has left a deep scar on our collective memory and compels us to reflect on why the international community failed to prevent it. It is my hope that the world community will never allow a repeat of the events that took place in Rwanda ten years ago.

The United Nations, through the cooperation of its intergovernmental machinery, must be mobilized to act and stop such massive eruptions of violence. The General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and other bodies have a shared responsibility to prevent such human tragedies. We need to use the resources of the United Nations system to conduct a more thorough analysis of such conflicts in order to be more effective in our preventive work.

With regard to the situation in Rwanda, the involvement of the Economic and Social Council commenced in 1994 with the endorsement of a resolution adopted by the Commission on Human Rights a few weeks after the eruption of the violent and tragic events. The Commission condemned in the strongest terms all breaches of international humanitarian law and all violations and abuses of human rights in Rwanda and called upon all parties involved to cease those breaches immediately. It also decided to establish within the Commission a Special Representative on the situation of human rights in Rwanda. The Economic and Social Council extended the mandate of the Special Representative until 2001. Although this work has been important, we will all recognize that the international community should have acted before the genocide, which could have made all the difference.

We have to act to save humanity from the ravages of war. The continued promotion of human rights, along with the strong and sincere advocacy role of the international community, is the centrepiece of any such endeavour. In recent years, the Council has taken a more active role in developing a capacity to respond to the problems of countries emerging from conflict and thus prevented conditions from worsening.

While the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council have begun to collaborate in these endeavours, much more can and remains to be done. The General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council must work together to develop the capacity of the United Nations to respond and to assist countries in such situations.

We are confident that the Security Council's invitation in setting up the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change will lead to reform measures that will make our Organization more responsive in meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century. We at the Economic and Social Council stand ready to play our part in contributing to strengthening the United Nations in this important task.

The President: The next speaker is Mr. Felipe Chidumo of Mozambique, who will make a statement on behalf of the African Union.

Mr. Chidumo (Mozambique): In my capacity as representative of the Chairperson of the African Union, I am honoured to join the international community in this commemorative meeting on the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Indeed, on this very day a decade ago, Rwanda witnessed one of the most brutal forms of cruelty human beings can inflict on one another. The world watched powerlessly while hundreds of

thousands of innocent civilians were brutally murdered.

The tragedy that befell Rwanda constitutes a reminder that genocide can happen again. The tragic events of 1994 have left Rwanda in a shambles and its society still grappling with their evil effects. The violence, brutality and untold losses endured by the Rwandese have made the international community wonder how such an act of evil could have happened unchecked. More important, how can such an act of evil be prevented from ever happening again in the world?

The commemoration of the tenth anniversary of that tragedy is a sober reminder that we must not fail again in assisting the people of Rwanda in their efforts to heal the wounds inflicted upon them. We must now walk alongside them, accompanying them as they rebuild a society that embraces all Rwandese and provides justice, peace and reconciliation for all of them.

The commemoration of the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda constitutes a clear example of our collective resolve to never again see a repetition of such heinous crimes against humanity. It provides an opportunity to recognize the failures of the past as well as to take action to prevent it from happening again.

The genocide in Rwanda defined the centrality of preventive action, which is the primary focus of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)/African Union (AU) Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. It was within that framework that, during the seventh ordinary session of the Central Organ of the OAU Mechanism, held in 1997 in Addis Ababa, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia challenged the collective conscience of African leaders by calling for the establishment of an international panel to investigate, among other things, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

The panel, chaired by Sir Ketumile Masire, former President of Botswana, presented its findings and recommendations in a comprehensive report, issued at the United Nations on 7 July 2000, entitled "Rwanda: the preventable genocide". That important report is a forward-looking document that spells out options for preventing genocide from ever happening again, and it is a positive contribution by the African continent to international efforts to prevent genocide.

We are meeting today to reflect on the past and collectively to pay tribute to the people of Rwanda, the African peoples and the world at large for their suffering throughout history. In working hand in hand with the Rwandese, we in Africa have made important strides towards putting in place the necessary structures and mechanisms to ensure that never again will we see a repetition of the horrors of the recent past.

With a clear emphasis on prevention, African leaders took a bold decision in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, which, in its article 4 (h), provides for:

> "the right of the Union to intervene in a member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity".

The African Union has stressed that the prevention of genocide should be pursued at the global level. To that effect, the Executive Council of the African Union, meeting at N'Djamena, Chad, at its second ordinary session, decided, inter alia, that 7 April 2004 — the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide — be commemorated by the Commission on Human Rights as a day of remembrance of the victims of genocide in Rwanda and as a reaffirmation of Africa's resolve to prevent and fight genocide on the continent.

We are pleased that today's commemorative meeting, which is convened in compliance with General Assembly resolution 58/234, entitled "International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda", is taking place as a materialization of the N'Djamena decision.

In conclusion, I should like to pay tribute to the courageous sons and daughters of Rwanda for their efforts to deal with the darkest period of their recent history. I should like also to join them in their prayers that the last vestiges of that bitter and painful memory be eradicated once and for all as they pursue a process of national healing and reconciliation and build a society without exclusion. The international community must remain vigilant so as to ensure that the potential for yet another genocide, which still exists in many parts of the world, including the African continent, be dealt with forcefully and decisively before it is too late. That requires concerted action from all of us. In this connection, we look forward to

the appointment by the Secretary-General of a Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, as that will constitute a step forward towards preventing such an evil.

The President: The next speaker is Mr. Francis Butagira of Uganda, who will make a statement on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): I am speaking on behalf of the African Group. This day — 7 April 2004 — has been designated by the General Assembly as the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda, which took place between April and July of that year.

The genocide in Rwanda was not spontaneous. It was preceded by cold, calculated and visible designs, including media propaganda urging a section of the Rwandan community, mainly Hutus, to rise up and wipe out another section, mainly Tutsis and moderate Hutus. And the international community — even after the first salvo was fired and exhortations were followed by horrific deeds — just watched. In a cynical twist, some peacekeepers even were withdrawn. Even when the massacres reached their crescendo, the international community watched. The innocent people of Rwanda were forsaken by the international community in their most crucial hour of need. The United Nations, especially the Security Council, which is responsible for promoting and maintaining international peace and security, had a case to answer.

We salute the courage and efforts of some few United Nations peacekeepers who tried to stop the massacres but who were overwhelmed by numbers and lacked reinforcements. We also thank those countries who, in one way or another, tried to assist.

This is perhaps not the time to dwell too much on what went wrong. Rather, it is a time for the international community to resolve that it will never again stand idly by while a similar situation is repeated elsewhere. Furthermore, it is a time to reflect on measures that should be put in place to prevent a similar occurrence. Such measures would include promoting the observance of human rights and good governance, both political and economic. In Africa, with its multiplicity of ethnic tribes, a system of governance that accommodates everybody would be a good thing. We also support the appointment by the Secretary-General of a Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, whose primary responsibility would be, among other things, to design an effective early-warning mechanism that would nip in the bud any nascent signs of genocidal tendencies. This should be backed by the will of the international community to act and not to hide behind the cloak of sovereignty and so-called non-interference in the internal affairs of the States concerned.

In conclusion, we put on record our appreciation and thanks to the Government of Rwanda, which has progressed on a course of reconciliation and promoting harmony among the various ethnic tribes that constitute the Rwandan population. The international community should support them in that endeavour. Our hearts go out in memory of those who perished in that terrible massacre and to the living who lost their dear ones.

The President: The next speaker is Mr. Le Luong Minh, who will make a statement on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): It is my great honour to address the General Assembly, in my capacity as Chairman of the Asian Group, at this meeting commemorating the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Today, 7 April — the day that the General Assembly has designated as the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda — Asian countries, together with all other countries, the United Nations and other relevant organizations throughout the world, are showing their sympathy and solidarity with the people and the Government of Rwanda by organizing special observances and activities in memory of the victims. The Asian countries believe that, as pointed out by the Secretary-General, marking the anniversary will bring the human family together, not only to reflect on the suffering and brutal deaths of 800,000 men, women and children in Rwanda and those of millions of people in other parts of the world, but also to resolve that genocide will never again be allowed to occur anywhere.

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by the General Assembly in 1948, clearly states that genocide is a crime under international law, and the international community has undertaken to prevent and punish the crime of genocide. It is an extremely sad reality that such crimes have continued to be committed in our modern times. We share the assessment of the

Secretary-General that the genocide in Rwanda raised questions that affected all of humankind, including fundamental questions about the authority of the Security Council, the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping, the reach of international justice, the roots of violence and the responsibility of the international community to protect people threatened by genocide. The Asian countries believe that, in order to ensure that such crimes of genocide never happen again, the international community needs to draw necessary lessons from the tragic reality in Rwanda 10 years ago.

The Asian countries consider the commemorative activities organized throughout the world today and in recent days as valuable opportunities for such a process. At the same time, we are concerned that not all persons who committed genocide a decade ago have been brought to justice. We therefore hope that such persons will be promptly arrested and tried by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and domestic courts in Rwanda.

We cannot undo the past. Neither can we forget that the United Nations was created principally to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to protect the dignity and worth of the human person. What the international community and the United Nations can do now is to help the Rwandan people and other peoples victimized by the most brutal crimes of genocide committed in modern history recover, reconcile and rebuild secure and peaceful countries and societies. The Asian countries welcome and highly value the efforts undertaken within the framework of the United Nations, its affiliated agencies and other relevant international organizations in bringing about justice for the Rwandan people and other victimized peoples and in helping their recovery process.

I wish to conclude my statement on behalf of the Asian Group by wishing the people and the Government of Rwanda success in healing their wounds and rebuilding their society and country. May the souls of the 800,000 Rwandan men, women and children and the millions of people elsewhere who are victims of genocide rest in peace.

The President: The next speaker is Mrs. Roksanda Ninčić of Serbia and Montenegro, who will make a statement on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mrs. Ninčić (Serbia and Montenegro): On behalf of the Group of Eastern European States, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting to commemorate the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. The Group of Eastern European States pays tribute to the victims of the genocide and expresses deepest sympathies to the people of Rwanda in their grief.

This is indeed a grave occasion not only for the people of Rwanda but for the international community as a whole. Our sadness for the victims is imbued with remorse for failing to respond appropriately to the atrocities in Rwanda. Therefore, while remembering the 800,000 innocent lives lost in this abhorrent massacre, the international community must also unequivocally express its commitment to ensuring that such crimes, which outrage humanity, never occur again anywhere in the world.

We must all reflect on what happened and draw lessons from our mistakes. We must reinvigorate efforts to establish a culture of prevention, particularly by resolutely striving to create and implement comprehensive strategies of conflict prevention. In this context, the Group wishes to welcome the plan to appoint a special adviser on the prevention of genocide. We assure him or her of our readiness to extend our necessary cooperation in his or her future endeavours.

The international community must do its utmost to help the people of Rwanda heal, reconcile and build a stable future. Bringing those responsible for the atrocities to justice is an essential precondition for the achievement of this goal. As the history of the twentieth century has demonstrated, horrendous crimes of genocide take place when impunity prevails. That is why ending impunity is essential if we are to prevent genocide from happening again. In this regard, we would like to underscore the importance of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, whose establishment and work contribute to demonstrating that impunity is not an option and that genocide will not be tolerated by the international community.

On this occasion, we would also like to express our support for the comprehensive efforts of the United Nations, particularly those of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, to assist the Rwandan and other post-conflict societies in Africa. As the African continent moves towards peace, stability and development, the issues of justice, respect for human

rights, reconciliation and eradication of poverty are of particular importance, as they are linked to major causes of conflict and instability on the continent. Therefore, we also support all activities within the African dialogue to promote justice and reconciliation in Africa.

The President: The next speaker is Mr. Lamuel Stanislaus of Grenada, who will make a statement on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada): The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC), for which I have the honour to speak, joins the previous speakers in thanking the President for convening this meeting in commemoration of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, a horrific demonstration of man's inhumanity to man within and outside a State that resulted in the destabilization of the entire Great Lakes region in Africa.

This solemn occasion affords the international community the opportunity to reflect on the atrocities of the past, the challenges of the present and lessons learned to ensure that no such heinous, barbaric and blood-chilling calamity befalls mankind again. And here the international community must accept culpability for failing to do what we should have done with respect to the abhorrent evil of the Rwandan genocide. That crime has stained the pages of history and remains indelibly etched on the national and international psyche — 800,000 persons killed in 100 days, including innocent children and the elderly.

The President: At this time it is almost noon. I will ask the indulgence of delegations, especially the Ambassador of Grenada, to stop momentarily so that we may stand for one minute of silence for the victims of the Rwanda genocide.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

The President: We now resume the proceedings of our commemorative meeting.

Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada): This bitter, deep-rooted hatred is the worst form of crime against humanity, the evil motivation to annihilate, in whole or in part, a nation, a race, a minority or an ethnic or religious group simply for being what they are. This definition was adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 260 (III) on 9 December 1948.

Categorizing the Rwandan atrocities as complex humanitarian emergencies stemming from fundamentally political and internal disputes that sovereign States must resolve is lethal logic which should have received early condemnation from the international community as a grave violation of human rights.

In this connection, let me quote the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, in his magnanimous, deeply moving and very human address before the parliament of Rwanda in Kigali on 7 May 1998:

> "The world must deeply repent this failure. Rwanda's tragedy was the world's tragedy. All of us who cared about Rwanda, all of us who witnessed its suffering, fervently wish that we could have prevented the genocide. Looking back now, we see the signs which then were not recognized. Now we know that what we did was not nearly enough — not enough to save Rwanda from itself, not enough to honour the ideals for which the United Nations exists. We will not deny that, in their greatest hour of need, the world failed the people of Rwanda."

In this regard, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States welcomes the measures put forward by the Secretary-General, including the possible establishment of a committee on the prevention of genocide and appointment of a special rapporteur and adviser, so that such a crime will never again remain a crime without a name. Additionally, the provisions enshrined in the Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court can serve as the bulwark against the recurrence of such barbarity.

In like manner, former President William Clinton of the United States of America expressed his "mea culpa, mea maxima culpa" in the following words in Kigali:

> "the international community, together with nations in Africa, must bear its share of responsibility for this tragedy ... We did not act quickly enough after the killing began. We should not have allowed the refugee camps to become safe havens for the killers. We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide. We cannot change the past. But we can and must do everything in our power to

help you build a future without fear, and full of hope."

These penitent and magnanimous words of two great world leaders reinforce the truism that evil triumphs when good men and women are either afraid or unwilling to speak. The great Italian poet Dante, in his "Divine Comedy", written in the Middle Ages, said that there is a place in hell for those who refuse to take a stand in the defence of truth and right.

With respect to the horrors of the Rwandan genocide, all of the above, taken together, should remind us of the divine law that hatreds are never stopped by hatreds in this world; it is by love alone that they cease. It is sad to say, however, that if there is anything that history has taught us, it is that we have learned nothing from it.

Finally, the nature and power of love as the antidote to hatred is best expressed in the Bible, in I Corinthians, chapter 13:

> "If I speak with the tongue of men and angels and have not love, I am become as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love is patient, is kind, envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up, is not prone to anger, not jealous, not self-seeking, does not keep a record of wrongs committed but instead love is entirely forgiving."

Therefore, summing up the three great supernatural gifts — faith, hope and love — the greatest of these is love, which conquers all.

In the words of Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu, there can be no future without forgiveness, and there can be no forgiveness without love.

The President: The next speaker is Mr. Aldo Mantovani of Italy, who will make a statement on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): It is an honour to represent the Group of Western European and other States on this special occasion. I thank the organizers of this ceremony commemorating the tenth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda for giving the regional groups the opportunity to express our profound sorrow on this sad occasion.

First of all, let me pay tribute to the extremely touching testimony presented to this hall by Ms. Jacqueline Muregatete.

Ten years ago, after many signals went unheeded, a ferocious wave of violence was unleashed in Rwanda. In only 100 days, more than 800,000 people were killed; neither women, children nor the elderly were spared. This is a time for us to remember the victims, mourn the dead and render homage to the strength and courage of the survivors. This event also provides us with an occasion to reflect on the international community's failure to prevent these heinous crimes, on the mistakes that were made and on the measures that must be taken to ensure that such atrocities will never again be perpetrated on the Rwandan people or any other people.

Speaking at the memorial conference two weeks ago, the Secretary-General stated unequivocally that if the international community had acted promptly and with determination, the worst of the massacre could have been prevented. But the political will was not there, nor were the troops. The international community failed in Rwanda and failed Rwanda, and that must always leave us with a sense of bitter regret and abiding sorrow.

Ten years later, the international community must stand united in saying "never again". The best way to pay tribute to the victims who we solemnly remember today is to forewarn and safeguard the world against any and all future attempts at genocide. We must all recognize that our common culture and civilization, which is based on respect for human life, cannot survive if such heinous crimes are permitted or tolerated.

On behalf of the Group of Western European and other States, I wish to commend the efforts and progress of the Rwandan people in rebuilding their country following the horrific events of 1994. Rwanda has adopted a courageous response in order to heal its wounds, combining justice, forgiveness and national reconciliation.

The role played by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in the fight against impunity for the main perpetrators should also be commended. The international community must continue to provide

active and concrete support to the survivors, assisting Rwanda in its quest for national reconciliation.

The Rwanda tragedy led to important steps for the improvement of the international peace and security system. It has influenced much of our thinking here at the United Nations and inspired discussions on such fundamental issues as humanitarian intervention, the scope of international justice, the responsibility to protect, the effectiveness of peacekeeping and the role of the Security Council.

The experience of the Rwanda genocide has prompted the international community to react more quickly to crisis and emergency situations. We realize, however, that more has to be done. The challenge of preventing new such crimes will remain a major concern for us all.

I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his latest initiatives aimed at further strengthening the United Nations tools in the area of early warning and the prevention of genocide, particularly his decision to nominate a special rapporteur. As was emphasized by the Secretary-General when launching his proposal at the Stockholm International Forum on the prevention of genocide in January, such a mechanism should make clear the link, often ignored until it is too late, between massive and systematic violations of human rights and threats to international peace and security. It is fundamental that we improve our collective ability to monitor violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in order to identify situations that may lead to genocide.

I also wish to commend the African Group for keeping the world's attention focused on the prevention of genocide. It is our intention to work closely with Africa — its countries, its subregional organizations and its Union — to strengthen African conflict prevention and peacekeeping capabilities. This may contribute to our common endeavour to prevent genocide anywhere in the world.

Above all, however, I wish to urge the international community to learn the lessons of 1994. We have to shoulder our common responsibility to protect people threatened by grave violations of human rights. In Rwanda, we all failed. The only way that we, as members of the international community, can start to make amends is to vow our determination to act in a prompt, effective and collective manner to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again.

May the victims of the Rwanda genocide rest in peace.

Boys Choir of Harlem

The President: The Assembly will now again have the pleasure of the performance of the Boys Choir of Harlem.

The Boys Choir of Harlem sang two songs for the General Assembly.

Statement by the President of the Security Council

The President: I now give the floor to the President of the Security Council for his closing remarks.

Mr. Pleuger (President of the Security Council): Today's commemoration has been an impressive and overwhelming statement of regret and remorse, of hope, of renewed commitment and of shared beliefs in the bonds of humankind. I would like to thank all those who have contributed to making this commemoration such a dignified and forward-looking event.

As I said before, while we look back at what happened in Rwanda 10 years ago, we must also look forward. Learning the lessons of the past, we must also ready ourselves to give new, better answers to the questions that face us at this crucial juncture of history. Those questions concern the authority and responsibility of the Council, the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping, the reach of international justice, the roots of violence and the responsibility of the international community to protect people threatened by genocide and other grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Those questions go to the core of the identity of the United Nations. Addressing those questions requires commitment: commitment to peace, international law and the worth of each and every member of the human family. Today's commemoration has been a compelling starting point to reinvigorate that commitment.

The President: The meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda is now coming to a close. Before adjourning this meeting, I wish to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council, representatives and honoured guests for their participation on this

momentous occasion. I would be remiss if I did not thank as well the former Ambassador of Tunisia, who was the Chairman of the African Group, and the Ambassador of Rwanda for the initiative they took in putting this programme together.

My thanks also go to the Secretariat staff, as this was not by any means or by any stretch of the imagination an easy meeting to put together. It was and is my intention to work as closely as possible with the President of the Security Council and the President of the Economic and Social Council in our efforts to ensure that the General Assembly's revitalization process is given true effect. I wish to thank them for their endeavours in this respect. The Secretariat played an instrumental role in assisting with this project and helped to make it the success that I hope it turned out to be.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.